

Sarah Ann Leany Stirling
18 August 1846 - 24 Oct 1900
by Katherine Stirling Christensen, May 1991

Sarah Ann Leany, my grandmother, was the first child of William Leany and Elizabeth Searce, who were early pioneers to Utah. Her father was born at Franklin, Simpson County, Kentucky on December 19, 1815 to Culbert Means Leany and Margaret Cook. He tells in his autobiography, that he and his twin brother, Isaac, were converted to the Mormon Church in February 1834 while living in Kentucky. They moved to Missouri in 1836, then to Nauvoo, Illinois in 1843. He died on December 29, 1891.

Her mother, Elizabeth Searce, was born at Richmond, Wayne County, Indiana on January 4, 1822 to William Searce and Nancy Walker. Her mother died when she was only eight years old. Elizabeth and her father were also early converts to the church and were the only members of the family to join. Elizabeth died June 9, 1908 and was buried by her husband, William Leany, at Harrisburg, Washington County, Utah.

William Leany and Elizabeth Searce were married in Nauvoo, Illinois on September 7, 1845. They, along with Elizabeth's father, William Searce, and a hired man, left Nauvoo in the early spring of 1846 in three wagons on the trek to Utah. Sarah Ann was born on Aug 18, 1846 at Cutler's Park, a stopping place in a grove of trees near Winter Quarters. This cool, shady spot, named after Alpheus Cutler, provided a pleasant relief from the summer heat to the pioneers. The book Discovering Mormon Trails identifies this territory as what is now Douglas County, Nebraska. It also tells how the summer months were very difficult for these pioneers as they lacked vegetables that were needed for a sufficient diet and that many died of scurvy. Sarah Ann's mother lost her teeth at that time as a result.

It was at Winter Quarters that Sarah Ann Spent her first winter. They left Winter Quarters near the 1st of July 1847, continuing their journey to the Salt Lake Valley. Sarah Ann's uncle, Isaac Leany, tells in his history that the company was large and consisted of 1353 persons and 566 wagons. The Leany family belonged to a company of 100 with Edward Hunter being their captain., They owned a milk cow that they brought along on the trip. Sarah Ann was one year old when they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in September of 1847.

The Leany family stayed in Salt Lake City just a little over three years during which time two other children were born: William Jr. was born on June 5, 1848, and Elizabeth on September 4, 1850.

It was late in the year of 1850 that Sarah Ann's father and many other saints were called to leave their homes in the Salt Lake Valley and go to Southern Utah to build up new settlements. They left December 18, 1850 and arrived in a settlement now known as Parowan, Iron County, Utah on January 13, 1851. William's family remained in Salt Lake to care for Sarah Ann's ailing grandfather, William Searce. He died a short time later on January 3, 1851 and was buried at City Cemetery in Salt Lake City. The family moved to Parowan later that year where they lived for eleven years. During this time five other children were born to the Leany family: Hyrum on August 26, 1852, David on February 8, 1854, Marietta on March 18, 1856, Amelia on February 21, 1858, and Mary on Dec 19, 1859.

In 1861, Sarah Ann's parents and others were called to leave their homes and go to what was called the "Cotton Mission" in Southern Utah. William, having lived in the South, may have known something of raising cotton. Her father went to the Dixie area of Southern Utah in the winter of 1861-62, and in the spring, Sarah Ann and her brothers, William and Hyrum, went down to help plant the crop. Sarah Ann was 14 years old at the time and was probably a big help to her father. It was later in the year that William moved the rest of his family from Parowan to their new home in Harrisburg, Washington County, Utah.

Another brother, and the last child, Thomas Jefferson was born July 4, 1865. This seemed to be a very difficult time for the Leany family as it was growing in numbers and there was very little to sustain them. Elizabeth was an expert seamstress and made and dyed yarn and wove it into cloth for her family's clothing and also knitted much of what they wore. Sarah Ann learned these skills and passed them on to her daughters. It was in Harrisburg that Sarah Ann spent the rest of her growing-up years.

A young man, William Stirling, who was born August 31, 1841, in Forfar, Angus County, Scotland and a convert to the Mormon Church, left his native land along with his sister, Jessie, to come to Utah in May of 1862. It is not known exactly why he came to the southern part of the state. Since many of his ancestors, including his father, were weavers, it is assumed it was to carry on this business. He lived with the Leany family for a time. Sarah Ann was 19 years old when she and William Stirling were married on February 5, 1865.

They made their first home in Harrisburg for a short time. William and others were called to go to Long Valley in Kane County, Utah to help put down some Indian attacks. William and Sarah Ann moved there and built a home in Glendale, Kane County, Utah. Here they planted fruit trees and a garden. Their first son was born on February 16, 1866 and was named William Jr. Trouble with the Indians became so serious that the people abandoned the settlement after two years and William and Sarah Ann moved back to Harrisburg. Their second son, Thomas, was born there on May 26, 1868. In September of 1868, the family traveled to Salt Lake City to be sealed in the Endowment House for "Time and Eternity."

In the winter of 1869, Sarah Ann was again moving to a new settlement and a small home at Bennington which was located just a few miles north of Harrisburg, the name of which was later changed to Leeds. More children blessed their home, and on November 25, 1869, a son Hyrum was born and on September 9, 1871, their first daughter, Elizabeth Ann, was born. Another son, Adelbert, was born January 25, 1873 and later two daughters, Helen May on October 1, 1874 and Sarah Elinor on February 25, 1876.

It was during this year that William and Sarah Ann had a big two-story red brick home. It had a large cellar and three fireplaces to warm them during cold weather. Sarah Ann must have felt like a queen with such a large beautiful home in which to raise her children and hopefully to spend the rest of her life in. She had truly been a pioneer, moving from settlement to settlement up until this time. The home has now been put on the Utah Historical Society Register and the Plaque reads "Stirling home built of red brick by Samuel Worthen and Sons for William Stirling, one of the first settlers of Leeds, fine example of Dixie Dormers unique to Southern Utah." This marker was placed by Mrs. David Stirling and Family.

Seven more children were born to Sarah Ann and William: Jessie Amelia on November 26, 1877; Alice on November 18, 1879; Ida on December 38, 1881; Ruth on October 15, 1883;

David, my father, on July 23, 1885; Isabel on January 30 1888; and Joseph, November 15, 1889. This made a total of fourteen children for Sarah Ann and William. I believe that she must have been a strong and patient woman to be able to care for such a large family.

My mother, Ethel Isom Stirling, tells of a story told to her by a niece of Sarah Ann, Elizabeth Leany Cox. "When Sarah Ann was expecting her 12th child, David, she was feeling discouraged and blue. At this time the booming mining town of Silver Reef was winding down and was just a short distance from Leeds. It was here that they had had a good market for the wine they had made from their grapes. Some of the family had been sampling and drinking the remains and Sarah Ann had been upset because of it. She had a dream and in it was told that the baby she was carrying would be a boy and that he was to be named David, and he would be a great comfort to her in her life."

Sometime after Silver Reef had closed down, the Stirling's obtained one of the buildings from there and brought it to Leeds where it was used as a place for entertainment and a dance hall. Often traveling entertainment companies would stop there to perform; it was called the Stirling Hall. William Stirling loved to dance and entertain.

The Stirling's also had a store at one time; the boys would help freight supplies from Modena and Lund. My father, David, told me the story about a time when he was around 15 years of age that had had traveled to Lund for freight and it was around Christmas. An older man, Oscar McMullin, had gone several days earlier and had just returned. Sarah Ann asked this man if he had seen her son on his way. He said that he had but didn't know if he would ever make it back home as the weather was averaging about 20 degrees below zero. However, David made it home the following day.

A niece of Sarah Ann's, Etta McMullin Marriger, told my sister, Charlene Stirling Knell, during an interview that "Sarah was my mother's sister; she was always dressed in what you would call 'Gray Washington Factory Wool' dresses and a gray or colored summer dress. She was not quite as tall as my mother, more like Bell's type (a daughter Isabell) but not as plump. She showed a lot of patience with kids and sometimes could order us out from under her feet with some force, in fact. She was straightforward in her speech, plain in her manner, quiet and could be dignified. She was very practical, a good housekeeper and came up to her husband's standards in know-how and general abilities."

Sarah Ann loved flowers. She planted a white rose bush, called "Martha Washington," that is still growing in front of the house. She had a pink climbing rose close to the back door and a wisteria vine that used to climb up at one corner of the front porch. The white rose bush and wisteria are still growing now in 1991.

Sarah Ann also experienced sorrows in raising her children. On June 2, 1883, Hyrum, her 13-year-old son, was killed when his team and hay wagon ran over him. The horses became frightened and bolted and Hyrum fell from the wagon and was run over. Another son, Adelbert, who was 22 years of age, died of consumption in 1895 and a daughter, Helen May, who was 25, died in 1899 of the same illness.

William, Sarah Ann's husband, was called to go on a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to Scotland, his native country. He went to what was called the Glasgow Conference which was under the direction of President David O. McKay. In a letter to Sarah

Ann written the day after arriving, he stated that he would be laboring in the Aberdeen area. He said that the next day he would be going to see the folks in Forfar. This left a great responsibility for Sarah Ann and the children still at home, the youngest now ten years of age. At this time Sarah Ann was the Leeds Ward Relief Society President. William asked in another letter how the girls (Alice and Ida) were doing at the Branch Normal School in Cedar City. He also asked how her bees were doing as she had a hive or two to care for. He asked for the children to mind Willie (William and Sarah's oldest son) and for each of them to write some soon. In a letter dated December 22. 1898, he closes with "God bless you my dear wife, your affectionate husband, William Stirling." William returned home from his mission in May 1900.

It was just a few months later that Sarah Ann died at the age of 54, on October 24, 1900. Stories that have come down from family members say that she died from tuberculosis, having contracted it from her two children that had passed away previously. From the Deseret News on November 28, 1900, a correspondent from Leeds states "Mrs. Sarah A. Stirling, President of the Relief Society of the Ward, died October 24, 1900. At the funeral on the following day, Bishop Murdock of Beaver and Elder Spillsbury of Toquerville and other speakers, dilated upon the faithful and useful character of the deceased."

Sarah Ann's beloved William lived another fifteen years. He passed away on November 24, 1915 and was buried next to Sarah Ann in the Leeds cemetery. There is a lovely old marker at the gravesite with their names and also four of the children; Hyrum, Helen May, Adelbert and Jessie Amelia.